DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 258 174 CS 208 864

AUTHOR Onore, Cynthia S.
TITLE The Transaction between Teachers' Comments and Students' Revisions: Catalysts and Obstacles.
PUB DATE [84]
NOTE 27p.; Appendix pages may be marginally legible.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Case Studies; *Expository Writing; Higher Education; *Revision (Written Composition); *Teacher Response; Teacher Student Relationship; Writing (Composition); *Writing Evaluation; Writing Processes; *Writing Research

ABSTRACT

One area of the writing process that has received considerable attention is revision. A case study was conducted to generate a picture of the effects of revision on texts, the writers' intentions and perceptions, and readers' assessments of the written products. Three students--Dan, Alex, and Miranda--enrolled in a required expository writing class at a large urban university volunteered to particpate in this study. During the semester, all students in the class wrote seven essays, each of which went through at least two revisions. The third and fifth essays were singled out for investigation. In addition to the drafts of the essays, the data included transcripts of reporting-in protocols, which had been tape recorded. Neither Alex nor Dan made any substantial revisions in their texts. Although Miranda was willing to revise, the revision served as a catalyst to stimulate new ideas rather than making her aware of problems in the original text. It must be concluded that texts will exhibit gains and losses as writers reformulate, and that commenting practices and evaluating systems that recognize the cyclical nature of growth in writing and improvement in texts need to be created. (An appendix includes samples of Miranda's writing.) (DF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED258174

The Transaction between Teachers' Comments and Students' Revisions: Catalysts and Obstacles

Cynthia S. Onore

Assistant Professor of English Education

Syracuse University

170 Huntington Hall

Syracuse, New York 13210

(315) 423-4755

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Cynthia S. Onore

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS 208 864

Abstract

The Transaction between Teachers' Comments and Students' Revisions:
Catalysts and Obstacles

A case study of three college writers enrolled in a required expository writing class was conducted in order to explore the effects of teachers' comments on students' revision processes and the text drafts they produced. The data include the drafts of two completed essays for each writer, reporting-verbal reports, and retrospective interviews. Blind scoring by three raters of the drafts in each text series revealed that three essays generally improved over successive drafts. Further analysis revealed that improvement was characteristic of the two participants who confined their revisions to micro-level, meaning-preserving changes. It was discovered that the participant whose texts consistently suffered losses in effectiveness over successive drafts was the writer who engaged in macro-level, meaning-changing revisions. Her case is summarized in this report. Close textual analysis coupled with analysis of the verbal reports and interviews suggested that this writer had engaged in substantive revision, that she had used revision to discover new meanings and that the teacher's comment had acted as a catalyst. Obstacles to improving this text emerged as a result of attempting to delve more deeply into the issues in the text and to transform a narrative into an argument. Thus, the writer grew while the text suffered losses in control. As a result, the researcher concluded that improvement in writing is not linear, and that growth of writers must be valued as well as the growth of their writing.

The Transaction Between Teachers' Comments and Students' Revisions: Catalysts and Obstacles

The major thrust of the research on composing over the past twenty years has been the recognition that there is a marked disparity between the composing processes of real writers in real writing situations and the precepts of composition pedagogy in ordinary classrooms. Such research has defined these distinctions and has called into question the utility of what has been termed the current-traditional model (Young, 1978). It is natural that questioning a long-standing tradition and researching alternatives result in an urgency to develop practices more compatible with burgeoning theories. In composition studies, progress has taken just this course. Though a unified theory of composing is still emerging, pedagogies have proliferated under the "new paradigm" (Hairston, 1982).

One area of research to receive considerable attention in the new paradigm is revision. There are now whole collections of research on revision (Sudol, 1982) as well as separate pedagogies of revision (Mohr, 1984). One way to account for this emerging attention is that research within the new paradigm has quickly changed our view of revision as a one-time, after completion of a draft activity (Rohman, 1965) to an on-going mental activity informing composing at any and all points (Berthoff, 1984; Flower & Hayes, 1981a, 1981b; Gebhardt, 1984; Perl, 1980; Sommers, 1980). Another reason for such a change may rest upon the fact that a significant difference between the processes of novice and experienced writers is their revising habits (Sommers, 1980; Faigley & Witte, 1981). With increasing sophistication, researchers have been able to specify the sorts of revisions which are characteristic of student and expert writers. As a result, attention has been able to focus on

ways to encourage student writers to use the power of revision in a manner more characteristic of sophisticated performances. Since teachers have traditionally spent countless hours commenting on students' text, explorations of commenting practices and their effects have been forthcoming. Particular attention has been paid to the kinds of revisions students engage in when they receive written feedback (Beach, 1979; Ziv, 1984). But the overall effects on the quality of students' texts when they employ expert-like strategies has been largely overlooked.

Let me summarize, then, what research within the new paradigm has thus far yielded in the form of operational definitions and predictions about the revision process generally, the nature of novice, as opposed to experienced writers' revising practices, and the role of teacher written commentary.

About a normative theory of revision:

1. Revision is an on-going mental process informing composing and not a stage (Bertoff, 1984; Flower & Hayes, 1980, 1981a; Murray, 1978; Perl, 1979, 1980; Sommers, 1980).
2. Writers revise in order to discover their meanings and shape them for a reader (Perl, 1980; "A Revisionist View," 1982; Sommers, 1980).
3. Evaluation and reviewing underlie revision (Flower and Hayes, 1981a).
4. Revision is spurred by sensing dissonance between intentions and executions (Sommers, 1980).

About distinctions between practiced and unpracticed writers:

1. Good writers generate a network of goals and plans which guide composing and revising; unpracticed writers generate very abstract or very local plans (Flower and Hayes, 1981a, 1981b).

2. Experienced writers revise globally and locally using a variety of revision strategies; unpracticed writers revise locally and use a limited number of revision strategies (Beach, 1979; Bridwell, 1980; Faigley & Witte, 1981; Sommers, 1979).
3. Experienced writers use revision to discover their meanings while inexperienced writers approach writing with set meanings and use revision to clean up the surface of their discourse (Marder, 1982; Sommers, 1980).
4. Good writers revise extensively and improve their texts, poor writers revise infrequently and their revisions have little or no effect on the quality of their texts (Beach, 1979; Bridwell, 1980).

On the role of teacher intervention in the form of written commentary:

1. In-process comments encourage revision (Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982; Kirby & Liner, 1981; Murray, 1978; Sommers, 1982).
2. Teachers comments must be text-specific. They should dramatize for the writer the response of a real reader and not a reader with an Ideal Text in mind (Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982; Sommers, 1982).
3. Teacher's comments should undermine the writer's reliance on a first draft (Sommers, 1982).
4. Directive commentary will have short-term effects on the quality of students' successive drafts (Ziv, 1984). Facilitative commentary will promote both short and long-term gains.

In order to describe the workings of the new paradigm under actual classroom conditions, a study was designed to explore the following questions:

1. What sorts of revisions do students attempt in response to facilitative teacher commentary?
2. What effects do student writers' revisions have on the quality of the texts they produce in response to teachers' comments?
3. In what ways do students develop as writers when they revise their texts based upon teacher intervention in the form of written commentary? Do teachers' comments contribute to the development of writing abilities?

Methodology

Studies of revision have tended to concentrate on one, and occasionally two of three possible aspects of revision: the writer (protocol analysis, and interview); the reader (teachers' evaluation and commenting practices) or the text (taxonomies and frequencies of change intra and interdraft). While studying each aspect in isolation has produced important insights, researchers have suggested that combining methodologies will yield the richest descriptions (Failgey and Witte, 1982). Therefore, this study employed methodologies which would generate a picture of the effects of revision on texts, writers' intentions and perceptions, and readers' assessments of written products.

Data Collection

In order to develop a picture of the revising of student writers in a classroom context a case study approach was chosen. Three students enrolled in a required expository writing course at a large urban university volunteered to participate in this study. They were Alex, Dan, and Miranda. The researcher was also the classroom teacher. This dual role allowed for the possibility of monitoring the students in the naturalistic classroom setting. These three writers were followed for one semester.

All students in the class wrote seven essays during the semester each of which went through at least two revisions: one catalyzed by peer group response and one by teacher written commentary. For the purposes of this study, the third and fifth essays (C and E respectively) of the term were singled out for investigation. In one respect, these assignments differed from the pattern for the rest of the class. In order to compose the best possible comment on the research participants' texts, I collaborated with two other experienced writing teachers. First we commented independently on the students' papers and then met to share our comments and to come to a consensus about how to respond to the students' papers. Finally, I copied the mutually agreed upon comment on to the participant's essay so that these essays for these writers appeared to be receiving exactly the same treatment as the writing of the rest of the class. This somewhat elaborate procedure was employed in order to avoid creating idiosyncratic commentary or commentary which implied to the writers that there was an Ideal Text (Brannon and Knoblauch, 1982) to which their writing was to conform.

Reporting-in protocols. In addition to the drafts of essays C and E for each writer, the data include transcripts of reporting-in protocols, a procedure designed by Peitzman (1982). Participants were given a tape recorder to use at home while they wrote. This procedure has the advantages of allowing the writer to compose at a time and in a place of his or her choosing, and, in contrast to composing aloud, reporting in allows a writer to decide when to stop and talk into a tape recorder. Commentary is therefore not simultaneous with composing and may occur during natural resting places in writing. A practice reporting-in session was held with the researcher and then each of the participants was instructed to report-in while composing all drafts of essays C and E.

Interviews. After completing a text draft series, the writers met with the researcher to discuss the composing and revising decisions the writer had made. These interviews were open-ended in order that they might follow whatever issues seemed of greatest importance in the composing of a particular series of drafts. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

Text ratings: In order to determine how the revisions the participants made affected a reader's perception of the relative quality of text drafts in a series, three outside readers were asked to rank order the drafts in a writer's series. In order to prevent the readers from knowing the order in which the texts had been composed, the drafts were stapled together in a random order.

Readers were given three tasks: 1) They were to read and rank order the texts according to their perception of relative quality of drafts in a series. This reading was to be holistic. The draft judged to be most effective would receive a "1", the next effective a "2" and so on (see Table 1). 2) The readers were asked to make comments about what had caused them to rate the essays as they had. 3) They were to construct a macroproposition (vanDijk, 1980) for each text draft which conveyed the gist of the text. This procedure was used in order to judge the overall effect of revision on the text. If the macroproposition remained stable across text drafts, then the effects of revision could be characterized as meaning-preserving (Faigley and Witte, 1981). If the macroproposition changed from draft to draft, the revisions could be characterized as meaning-changing (Faigley & Witte). Since, novice writers typically confine their revisions to the former and experts make frequent use of the latter, this information was deemed significant.

Table 1
Text Ratings by Reader

Student-Text	Rater	First	Second	Third	Fourth
A-C	X	3	2	1	
	Y	3	2	1	
	Z	3	1	2	
A-E	X	3	2	1	
	Y	2	3	1	
	Z	3	2	1	
D-C	X	3	1	2	
	Y	2	1	3	
	Z	3	1	2	
D-E	X	3	1	2	
	Y	3	2	1	
	Z	3	2	1	
M-C	X	2	1	3	
	Y	2	1	3	
	Z	2	1	3	
M-E	X	2	1	4	3
	Y	4	3	2	1
	Z	4	1	3	2

Note. 1 = most effective draft in series

Text analysis. My intention was to describe the changes a writer made from draft to draft. Each text draft was divided into paragraphs and the paragraphs laid side by side (See Appendix for this display of the three drafts of Miranda's Essay C). This division of successive drafts relied on decisions about meaning equivalence. In order to make these decisions, the paragraphs of each draft were summarized by the researcher. Those which conveyed a similar thrust were judged to be equivalent and placed side by side. Those which changed were placed by themselves. In this way it was possible to make judgements about the effects of revision from draft to draft on the basis of this visual display alone. As a further check, I consulted

the readers' sets of macropropositions. the texts which had stable macropropositions also had paragraph equivalence.

Interviews and reporting-in protocols. The writer's own words are the closest research can get to the internal thinking and choice-making which power composing. Transcripts were analyzed for insight into what underlay the writers decisions. In particular, the writer's construal of the writing task, attitude about it, reactions to the written commentary, and whatever "obstacles to revision" (Della-Piana, 1978) which may have presented themselves during composing as well as catalysts for revising were the object of scrutiny.

The Writing Workshop and the Researcher's Assumptions

The pedagogy informing the classroom in which this study took place was intended to reflect the new paradigm. To that end, assignments were open-ended, invention heuristics were available, peers met regularly to share and help one another, teacher commentary was facilitative, instruction in revision was given, and students were allowed to choose which of their pieces they would like to submit for evaluation at the end of the semester. In such an environment, this teacher-researcher built up a set of assumptions about how students would respond to this pedagogy and how their writing abilities would develop.

It was assumed, for example, that facilitative commentary would affect subsequent drafts positively, that in addition to encouraging substantive revision in the form of reconceptualization, the text drafts would improve successively. It was assumed that in avoiding text appropriation by employing facilitative commentary, the writer's motivation to revise would be high. Preliminary data analysis, however, revealed a different pattern from the one anticipated (see Table 1).

Out of the six text series, only one final draft unaminously received the highest rating (A-E) with two series (A-C and D-E) following a generally linear progression. The only text series with unanimous ratings is M C and the decision here indicated that the final draft was the least effective of the three. Even though Miranda's other essay (M-E) received highly skewed ratings, the general trend is toward a degeneration in quality.

The pattern of macropropositions is equally interesting and also counters an underlying assumption. In spite of the facilitative commentary and composing of successive drafts, two of the three readers generated a single macroproposition for all of the drafts in both series for Alex and Dan. Only Miranda essays generated at least two and sometimes three different macropropositions for the drafts in a single assignment.

Alex and Dan: Invitation to Revise Rejected

Whatever the overall quality of the final drafts Dan and Alex produced, it is clear that the commentary did not catalyze textual reformulation. In Alex's case, it is his stated satisfaction with his first draft efforts that prevents him from entertaining revisions of a substantive sort. Dan, on the other hand, while exhibiting similar patterns in his texts, approaches his writing quite differently. Dan can never feel confident enough in his own writing to entertain any meanings which might sabotage his already tenuous coherences.

Miranda: Invitation to Revise Accepted

In contrast to Dan and Alex, Miranda seems willing to undermine her own coherences with a disappointing result. It therefore, became the particular task of the researcher to account for both the Miranda's willingness to reformulate and her inability to produce a satisfying text. This analysis will be the focus of the remainder of this report.

Were we to look only at Miranda's drafts for Essay C, we could be content to assert that her text degenerates from its second to its final draft. Such a assertion would lead no further than the fact that the commentary on draft two had typical effects on the writer's revisions. That is, that despite our efforts to produce a comment which would foster an improved textual result through revision, the text nonetheless fails. Such an analysis would simply support what research to date has revealed about the role of teacher commentary in students' revisions: that it has little or no effect on the quality of student writing (Beach, 1979; Ziv, 1984). To move beyond such an analysis requires that we scrutinize the choices Miranda made as well as the effects of those choices on her text, and furthermore that the underlying assumption that revision and improvement can be yoked together casually be examined critically. (The reader will be better able to follow the analysis after reading all of Miranda's drafts which may be found in the Appendix.)

The description which follows will rest upon locating choice points for Miranda as they appear in the reporting-in verbal reports, the interviews and the language choices in her texts. There are in essence two sorts of choice points: those which create and are created by catalysts to revision; those which create and are created by obstacles to improvement. The use of create and are created by is intended to suggest that a dialectical relationship exists between' the writers thoughts and intentions, her language and executions.

Discussion

Catalysts to Revision

Interest in new meanings. For Essay C, Miranda chose to interview her friend, Phil, about an expectation he had that wasn't fulfilled. Her assignment specified that she interview someone older than herself and tell

that person's story. According to Miranda, draft one of Phil's story is about how college turned out to be different than what he had expected. While composing draft one, Miranda reports in that she "enjoyed the topic because it seemed very relevant." Since Miranda was just then beginning college herself, it is not surprising that someone else's experiences in college would strike her as a relevant and enjoyable topic.

After she completed the three drafts for this assignment, I interviewed Miranda. She tells me that, "From the first to the second draft I had pretty much given up on it and it was just like, this is how it's going to be." In the move from draft two to draft three, however, Miranda once again becomes interested in the story. What seems to be responsible for her rekindled interest is the shift from writing a story about how "college isn't for everyone" to exploring a young adult's relationship with his parents. She explains that, "I added more of Phil's thoughts and his interaction with his parents and eliminated, then he did this, then this etc. . .I eliminated points not important to the story and added detail to the more relevant ones." From the start she had deemed the relationships to be "important aspects of the story" but immediately following the composing of 1:1 and 1:2 she expresses dissatisfaction with the way the story was coming out. Exploration of the complex relationships among the characters in the story she describes as straying from the topic" and making the story "too long and uninteresting." As she composes draft three, however, she allows herself to follow those meanings, to explore the relationships which underlay the story about Phil's college experience.

Even her revision strategy differs for this draft: "When I worked on the final [draft] I attacked it sentence by sentence instead of by paragraphs." Such diligence contrasts markedly with the attitude she had toward composing

draft two when she felt that, "this is how it's going to be," and so had changed a word here and there, added direct quotations and paraphrased her own language. In short, revising for draft three generated anew Miranda's interest in the story and her interest in the story, attained through reformulation, catalyzed more revisions.

Teacher's comment. On draft two we wrote:

> The real issue raised by your first two paragraphs is the nature of Phil's dependence on parents and teachers to tell him what to do with his life and how to do it. His realization came as a result of his making his own decisions. I want to know how his parents responded to this. Phil's emergence as a successful student and worker in his independently selected field points to quite a different conclusion than the one in your last paragraph. Try to explore these concerns when you revise Phil's story.

The teacher's comment on draft two was clearly a catalyst for revision; it both heightened the tensions in the text for Miranda by reflecting the dissonance felt by the readers and also led her to attempt to resolve those tensions which in turn led her to reconceptualize her meanings. In other words revision itself catalysed revision by revealing and generating new insights and new language.

Obstacles to Improvement

Ambivalent intentions. While composing the opening of the first draft (1:1) Miranda remarks that she wants to "get the personalities of Phil and his parents across to her readers" because these "are all important aspects of the story." She appears to expend considerable energy and time on characterizing Phil's father whom she describes while reporting in as "a very loud man with a definite personality." After composing the opening paragraph she remarks that the quotation "lost something in the translation" because "his father has a loud voice and a thick Italian accent." She worries that "someone else would be able to pick up on this man's intense little personality." Miranda's

attitude toward Phil's father seems to encompass two simultaneously held but contradictory attitudes.

When she reflects on her characterization of Phil, she "realized that perhaps Phil was coming out sounding wrong, that he was a person that could be pushed around and everything." In order to counter such an impression, Miranda composes the next paragraph (1:2) and tells the reader directly:

> don't get the idea that Phil is easy to push around or a mamma's boy: he is just as domineering and aggressive as is his father.

But later on, after composing 1:3, Miranda summarizes the purpose of this paragraph: "It showed an aspect of . . .(Phil's) upbringing, having someone giving him advice and just taking." For Miranda, the counselor's advice in 1:3 was bad advice and she disapproves of the fact that Phil "accepted his counselor's words as law." Following the composing of 1:4, she explains that Phil, "pretty much takes things as they come, and if they offer him something, he'll say O.K." One might reasonably conclude that Phil can be pushed around, even though Miranda insists at times that he can't. Her characterization of Phil is thus suspended between two intentions.

In composing the first draft, Miranda's feelings about Phil and his father act as obstacles, not to sensing dissonance, for this she readily does, but to resolving that dissonance. After sharing her draft with her peer group and getting questions from all four of her group members about the relationship between Phil and his parents, Miranda chooses not to answer their questions, but rather to follow one bit of advice which had suggested that she add direct quotations from the characters.

Instead of attempting to deal with the relationships between Phil and his parents in greater detail than in draft one, Miranda practically excises this aspect of the story from the text in draft two. One noteworthy absence is any

equivalent for 1:2. in the second draft. Since that paragraph in the first draft had been intended by Miranda to correct a supposedly mistaken, though nonetheless emerging impression of Phil, one explanation for its disappearance, supported by the thrust of draft two, is that Miranda is less concerned about misrepresenting Phil and more concerned with creating a unified picture than she had been. For all three raters, this choice was a sound one. One rater noted that in the first draft Phil sounded like a "pushover" and there did not seem to be any evidence that he was aggressive. The invitation to revise the first draft which Miranda's peers made was rejected by her because she chose to gloss over her own and the texts' ambivalence in favor of a more coherent text. For such a decision, she was rewarded by the raters. Since draft two presents a much more cohesive picture of Phil and his parents, we can assert that Miranda could discriminate the conflicting pictures of the characters in the text and resolve the conflicts. There is evidence, however, that this is not equally true of her feelings.

The teacher's comment on draft two (see page 12) must have served only to heighten the conflict between the intentions underlying Miranda'a choices. Since the team of commentators had not listened to the reporting-in protocols before commenting, our judgements were based entirely on the text. We had also asked in the margin, "Where is Phil's head in all this?" In response to this question, Miranda composed 3:2 which tells of Phil's feelings of annoyance and irritation toward his parents. Paragraph 3:3 continues in this vein while one again trying to display the complexity which lies at the heart of the relationship between Phil and his father: that of admiration and disillusionment combined. In her verbal report, Miranda illustrates the content of 3:3 by talking about Phil's response to a grade of "B" which Miranda had received on an exam. He was intolerant and berated her, much to

her own chagrin. This little story shows clearly how Phil treatsMiranda exactly the way his father treats him, a fact no doubt responsible for Miranda's attitude toward both Phil and his father.

As draft three continues, the threading of evaluation of Phil's emotions into the fabric of the story continues. Miranda seems to penetrate more and more deeply into Phil's character. For example, we learn that even though his parent's "had annoyed him, it was difficult for him to start making decisions on his own." A growing understanding of the issues involved is displayed in the third draft.

Tension between Formal and Content Schemata. Natural narratives display a set of formal features which is remarkably stable across contexts (Labov, 1972; Pratt, 1977). A text analysis of the three drafts of Miranda's essay based on the patterns typical of narrative reveals a number of interesting ways to account for the overall degeneration of Miranda's text in this series. In drafts one and two, Miranda controls the tense shifts which naturally occur when the conflicting action is interrupted by an evaluation by the narrator. While all the action is either simple present or simple past tense, the evaluative portions are in perfect or progressive tenses. The coda extends the story into the future by bringing the reader up-to-date and evaluates the outcome. What is the secondary structure in drafts one and two—the evaluation of the event receives less space. It is backgrounded in the way readers expect secondary structures to be handled in narrative, and the sequence of events in the story is foregrounded. Draft three has a very different set of formal features.

After minor modifications in 3:1, the combination of actions and evaluation in 3:2 and the concomitant time confusion suggest that the primary and secondary structures are competing for prominence. The action is in both

the present and the past tense, while the evaluation is in the present perfect. Verb aspect dissonance continues into 3:3. Here, we cannot tell whether the present tense indicates the time we enter the narrative as in 3:1 which is a past historical event, or the time of composing the story by the writer. Furthermore, the narrative is suspended for the whole of 3:3 in oder to compare two sets of events, neither of which is part of the narrative begun in 3:1. In 3:4, and 3:5, the complicating action is taken up for the one sentence which opens the paragraph and the suspended for the remainder of the paragraph. Only in 3:6 is there a conventional balance between the primary and secondary structures.

The final paragraph (3:7) though in some senses a typical coda informing the reader of the ultimate consequences of the narrative, is different from the c[illegible] in drafts one and two. There is a tendency toward closure to the story which predominates rather than a sense of continuation. The use of the past tense, in contrast to the present tense of drafts one (1:7) and two (2:5), may be responsible for this impression. However, the use of the word "now" and the final quotation in 3:7 belie closure.

What is responsible, then, in part for the failure of draft three is the tension between new meanings, and insightful ones at that, and a more or less stable formal scheme. The narrative scheme, however, cannot hold, for the once simple story of Phil's gaining independence verges on an argument for how one might gain independence from parents. Miranda states that her intention for draft three is "to show the steps Phil went through in gaining his independence" a very different intention from the initial one of telling a story of Phil's expectation of college which was not fulfilled.

Creating coherence while piecing together the backgrounded narrative and the foregrounded interpretation presents serious problems for Miranda,

problems which manifest themselves in part in the verb aspect choices she makes. But the failure of draft three is also, paradoxically, a success. Not only does the change from narrative to argument represent growth, but the intellectual penetration of the issues is more ambitious. Miranda has made the writing task more difficult for herself by entertaining new meanings and a more ambitious structure. There are gains and losses in draft three "caused by and realized in" (Searle, 1983) Miranda's revisions.

Conclusions

The Myths of Improvement

The experience of text quality or its lack may be separate from and not a catalyst for revision. Many published writers evaluate, not the quality of their texts but their learning and discovery through composing (Miller, 1982). Judgements about the quality of a text may follow revision but they do not necessarily motivate it. An evaluative stance has the marked disadvantage of precipitating closure. Each time Miranda revised, she did so by prolonging her involvement in the writing event, thereby withholding closure. Berthoff (1980) has suggested that student writers need to learn to tolerate ambiguity and chaos because "meanings can be arrived at too quickly, the possibility of other meanings being too abruptly foreclosed" (p.77).

Good teacher commentary, therefore, demands re-entry into the composing process but does not necessitate an improved textual result. Students will revise just so long as we help to disengage revision from improvement and to connect it with exploration. This does not mean that experienced writers do not regularly experience improvement through revision. What it does imply is that improvement need not be the catalyst for revision nor the necessary result. As a result, teacher commentary may dramatize for a writer the potentials for exploration in a text and thereby catalyze revision.

Growth resides in writers and not necessarily in the texts they compose. A pedagogy which is truly process-based must value the growth of writers over writing, and as a consequence, improvement must be defined anew. Miranda, in essay C, is constructing a verbal object which reflects the ebb and flow of her own confrontations with relationships which are just then being realized in the textual event. A tension-filled text, such as the one Miranda produces, may be accounted for by acknowledging that customarily adequate language resources cannot necessarily accommodate the reach of new insight and heightened intellect penetration. If we define the development of writing abilities as more than rhetorical control, then we must value the growth of writers as well as the growth of their writing and redefine improvement in writing so that this construct is compatible with a more complex picture of developing competencies.

Implications for Research and Pedagogy

Revision may be fruitfully viewed not as a stage but as an act of mind which involves seeing what is, what is not, and what might be. In its observable forms, it can be located in changes in a text. More problematically, however, it must be located in the perceptions of the writer cum reader. The most profitable research will combine methodologies. Texts as they appear on the page and texts as they emerge form verbal reports are both inference bases from which, in combination, hypothesis about composing may be derived.

A recursive view of composing may require a recursive view of the development of an individual text and the development of a writer over time. In this light, teachers comments become an inducement to resee a text in all of its potentialities and classroom instruction has as its goal coaching writers into a willingness to exploit the learning potential which inheres in

composing. The composition classroom, then, becomes a forum in which to explore "the forms of thought by taking language and the forms of language by taking thought (Berthoff, 1980, p.76).

In order to encourage the risk-taking involved in prolonging the writer's involvement in the revising event, in undermining tentative coherence, and withholding closure, we must establish the expectation that texts will exhibit gains and losses as writers reformulate. We can neither expect nor demand that students simultaneously reconceptualize and improve their writing. If we value the process of revision and its learning potential, we can be satisfied that texts in transition are evidence of growth though they may be disappointing in their execution. Commenting practices and evaluation systems need to be created which recognize that growth in writing and improvement in texts is cyclical in nature. Each time a writer re-enters the composing process she is making the individual task more difficult by taping the limits of her competencies.

These recommendations hinge upon placing secondary value on particular performances and primary value on developing competencies. In this way we may teach student writers that exploring possibilities, generating chaos, and creating coherence inhere in language use. They may in this way learn that through using language they will find order and tap their tacit powers of meaning-making.

References

Beach, R. (1979). The effects of between-draft teacher evaluation versus student self-evaluation on high school students' revising of rough drafts. Research in the Teaching of English, 13, 111-120.

Berthoff, A. (1980). Learning the uses of chaos. In A. Freedman & I. Pringle (Eds.), Reinventing the rhetorical tradition. (pp. 75-78). Conway, Ark.: L & S Books.

Berthoff, A. E. (1984). Recognition, representation and revision. In R. L. Graves (Ed.), Rhetoric and composition. (pp. 27-37). Montclair, N. J.: Boynton/Cook.

Brannon, L. & Knoblauch, C. H. (1982). On students' rights to their own texts: A model of teacher response. College Composition and Communication, 33, 157-166.

Bridwell, L. S. (1980). Revising strategies in twelfth grade students' transactional writing. Research in the Teaching of English, 14, 197-222.

Della-Piana, G. (1978). Research strategies for the study of revision processes in writing poetry. In C. R. Cooper & L. Odell (Eds.), Research on composing: Points of departure. (pp. 105-134).

vanDijk, T. A. (1980). Macrostructures: An interdisciplinary study of global structure in discourse, interaction, and cognition. Hillsdale, N. J.: Erlbaum.

Faigley, L. & Witte, S. (1981). Analyzing revision. College Composition and Communication, 32, 400-414.

Flower, L. & Hayes, J. R. (1980). The cognition of discovery: Defining a rhetorical problem. College Composition and Communication, 31, 21-32.

Flower, L. & Hayes, J. R. (1981a). A cognitive process theory of writing. College Composition and Communication, 32, 365-387.

Flower, L. & Hayes, J. R. (1981b). Plans that guide the composing process. In C. H. Frederiksen & J. F. Dominic (Eds.), Vol. 2. Writing: Process development and communication. (pp. 39-58). N. J.: Erlbaum.

Gebhardt, R. (1984). Changing and editing: Moving current theory on revision into the classroom. Rhetoric Review, 2, 78-91.

Hairston, M. (1982). Thomas Kuhn and the teaching of writing. College composition and communication, 33. 77-88.

Kirby, D. & Liner, T. (1981). Inside Out: Developmental Strategies for teaching writing. Montclair, N. J.: Boynton/Cook.

Labov, W. (1972). Language in the inner city. University Park, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Marder, D. (1982). Revision as discovery and the reduction of entropy. In R. A. Sudol (Ed.), Revising: New Essays for teachers of writing. (pp. 3-12). Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English.

Miller, S. (1982). How writers evaluate their own writing. College Composition and Communication, 33, 176-183.

Mohr, M. (1984). Revision. Montclair, N. J.: Boynton/Cook.

Murray, D. M. (1978). Internal revision: A process of discovery. In C. R. Cooper & Lee Odell (Eds.), Research on Composing: Points of departure. (pp. 85-103). Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English.

Peitzman, F. C. (1981). The composing process of three college freshmen: Focus on revision. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, New York University.

Perl, S. (1979). The composing process of unskilled college writers. Research in the Teaching of English, 13, 317-336.

Perl, S. (1980). Understanding composing. College Composition and Communication, 31, 363-369.

A revisionist view of teaching writing: Donald Graves on methods that work. (1982, December 8). Education Week, p. 12-14.

Rohman, D. G. (1965) Prewriting: The Stage of discovery in the writing process. College Composition and Communication, 16, 106-112.

Searle, J. R. (1983, April). Mind, brains and computers. Papers presented at the meeting of the Humanities Council, New York University, New York.

Sommers, N. (1980). Revision Strategies of Student writers and experienced adult writers. College Composition and Communication, 31, 378-388.

Sommers, N. (1982). Responding to student writing. College Composition and Communication, 33, 148-156.

Sudol, R. A. (Ed.). (1982). Revisions: New essays for teachers of writing. Urbana, Ill.: ERIC & National Council of teachers of English.

Young, R. (1978). Paradigms and problems: Needed research in rhetorical invention. In L. C. Cooper & L. Odell (Eds.), Research on composing: Points of departure. (pp. 29-47). Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English.

Ziv, N. (1984). The effect of teacher comments on the writing of four college freshmen. In R. Beach & L. S. Bridwell (Eds.), New directions in composition research. (pp. 362-380). New York: Guilford.

Appendix

Miranda: Essay C

1:1 Our little scenario starts on one bright day on the football field of Port Hamilton H.S. The field is covered with students in long blue graduation gowns and with parents eagerly carrying instamatic cameras, forcing their children to pose. One set of parents can be spotted showering praises on their only "man child," Phil. Phil's parents were both raised in Europe, came to this country with little education, no money and have worked their way into the American lifestyle. They have raised Phil never letting him forget how hard they worked, how lucky he is to be born into a middle class American family and how they expect success and perfection in every aspect of his life. So here we are, graduation day with the proud parents and son, Phil. "My son here is going to Brooklyn College," Phil's father reports, in a heavy Italian accent, to a nearby set of parents, "He's going to be a doctor. He's a smart boy, and he works hard." (This man should be a Little League mother.")

1:2 As anyone would realize soon after meeting this trio, Phil has demanding parents who have constantly told him what to do and what was expected of him (but don't get the idea that Phil is easy to push around, or a"mama's boy": he is just as domineering and agressive as is his father).

1:3 College and the responsibilities that accompany it were totally foreign to Phil; he just assumed it would be like high school; someone in authority would tell you what classes to take, the teachers would keep after you to do you work and with little effort, you could maintain a "B" average. With the advice of his counselor who agreed that it would be good for Phil to take a double major in Chem & Bio and minor in Math and computer science, Phil came out with a wonderful schedule. 3 days a week from 9-12 and 3-6 and 9-1 the other 2 days.

2:1 Our little scenario starts on one bright spring day on football field of Port Hamilton High School. The field is covered with students in long blue graduation gowns and their eager, camera-toting parents. One set of parents can be spotted showering praises on their only "manchild," Phil. Phil's parents were both raised in Europe, came to this country with little education, no money and have worked their way up into the middle class. They constantly remind Phil of how lucky he is, how much they've done for him, and how they expect success from him. So here we are, graduation day with the proud parents and son, Phil. "My son here is going to Brooklyn College," Phil's father reports, in a heavy Italian accent, to a passing father. He's going to be a doctor. He's a smart boy, and he works hard." Phil's mother stands by smiling and nodding obligingly.

2:2 College turned out to be a difficult transition for Phil. As he puts is, "I'd been so used to always having my parents and teacher tell me just what to do, I wasn't prepared to set my own schedules in college." He turned to his advisors for help. Together they agreed that Phil should take a double major in Chemistry and biology and minor in math and computer science. Phil's first schedule consisted of difficult classes that weren't in a good order.

3:1 Our little scenario starts on one bright spring day on the football field of Port Hamilton High School. The field is covered with students in long blue graduation gowns and their eager, camera toting parents. One set of parents can be spotted showering praises on their only "man child," Phil. Phil's parents were both raised in Europe, came to this country with no formal education, no money and have worked their way up into the middle class, with all of its benefits—a nice car, home and vacations. They constantly tell Phil that he is lucky to be born into a good home, that they've given him many wonderful opportunities to do well in life and that Phil owes it to them and himself to succeed. So here we are on graduation day with the proud parents and their son. "My son here is going to be a doctor," Phil's father reports in a heavy Italian accent to a passing father. He's going to Brooklyn College. He's a smart boy and he works hard." Phil's mother stands by smiling and nodding obligingly.

3:2 Their behavior irritates Phil but he's grown accustomed to it, so it's become a familiar annoyance. "Shut up," he whispered into his father's ear.

3:3 Over the years the relationshi between father and son steadily deteriorated into an ongoing polite argument. Every moment that the two are together Joe, Phil's father, nags him. "Did you do what I told you?" "Don't do that." Phil pretends to ignore him and will insist tha he doesn't listen to his father but I've known Phil long enough to realize that he does take his father's advice very seriously. In many ways Phil has developed the traits that he despises in his father. He is always offering me advice whenever I have a decision to make, even if I don't ask him for his opinion and he gets a little offended if I am not receptive to his suggestion.

3:4 Phil had a hard time adjusting to college life where students are forced to take on more responsibilities than they had in high school. Even though he was still living at home he was unable to turn to his parents for advice. For they were unaware of the demands of Phil's new life. Their advice had annoyed him but it was difficult for him to start making decisions on his own.

1:4 Phil was somewhat disillusioned by college. He felt that the subjects he was taking wouldn't be applicable in the real world and that he was wasting his time. Immediately after registering for his 5th semester, Phil dropped out. He'd plodded through the last four terms with C's and B's, felt he wasn't prepared for more intensive courses and was no longer sure what he wanted to do with his life.

1:5 Phil got a job with the Bd. of Ed. as a high school security guard that paid a decent salary, but his upbringing contributed to his displeasure with the job. It was a nowhere job, providing him with no chance to prove himself as he'd wanted to do.

2:3 Phil plodded thru school and became disinterested in medicine. He dropped out after his 5th semester to take time off to figure out what he wanted to do with his life. He got a job with the B. of Ed as a high school security guard that paid a decent salary, but he wasn't satisfied. It was a dead-end job and he quit after 9 months.

3:5 Phil quit school after two years, got a job and moved out of his house. Moving out forced him to sever all ties he had with his parents. Being "old world," they were enraged that he would move out before he got married. They also were sure that he was doing something that he had to hide from them. Phil was supporting himself working as a security guard, a job that payed a decent salary but offered no future.

1:6 After a few months of that he returned to Bklyn College, this time to pursue a business degree that he felt would be more useful. He found that he had both an interest and an aptitude in finance and accounting. He'd been spoiled by working and wasn't used to not having spending money. After weighing his options he transfered to Pace U. So he could go to school and work part time in a brokerage house. He spent a year at Pace and worked full time during the summer. His boss offered him a full time job with the company, and paying his tuition if he went to school at night. Decision time again. He decided to work full time and took a class at night. After 10 months Phil was made a supervisor and then 2 months later got promoted to a job with excellent opportunities, in the front office. He is now taking classes to become a registered stock brokerage and is studying very hard really for the first time.

2:4 . He bumped around for the summer and then returned to Brooklyn College, this time to pursue a busines degree. He thought that the classes he'd take would be more applicable to the real world and he discovered he had both an interest and an aptitude for finance. Working for almost a year had gotten him used to having spending money so after a term he transferred to Pace University. "Pace was a better business school and I could work part time on Wall Street in a finance related job." Phil learned quickly at work, his boss offered him a full time position and the company would pay tuition at evening classes. Phil accepted and quickly advanced first made a supervisor after 6 months and two months later he was again promoted to a great front office job. He is taking classes now to become a stock broker and is studying and working very hard with great dedication for the first time in his life. He explains his new attitude, "But I like what I'm doing."

3:6 After a year Phil quit work to return to school. His upbringing influenced his decision; he'd been trained to succeed and to seek out challenges. This time when he entered Pace University he knew what he wanted from the school. He took business classes and worked part time in a brokerage house. His boss offered him a good full time job which he accepted after finishing his first semester at Pace. He did well in the brokerage house and has since received several promotions.

1:7 I think Phil's experience shows that college isn't for everybody and isn't the only vehicle for success. I have to agree with Phil that it's better to get your head together before going to college so you know what you want to get out of your education. Phil is doing extremely well now (even his parents are proud) because he's in a field that interests him, and interest is a very important part of succeeding.

2:5 I think Phil's experience shows that colleye

isn't for everybody and isn't the only vehicle for success. I have to agree with him that it's better to get your head together before going to college so that you know what you want to get out of your education. Phil is doing well (his parents are even proud) because he's in a field that interests him; and "interest is a very big part of success."

3:7 Phil moved back in with his parents. He had matured, gained his independence, and set a direction for his life. He no longed needed his parents advice and since they now could be proud of their son they stopped offering it—except for an occasional "Phil, get your hair cut."